

**Congress of the United States**  
Washington, DC 20515

April 9, 2020

The Honorable Ajit V. Pai  
Chairman  
Federal Communications Commission  
455 12<sup>th</sup> Street SW  
Washington, DC 20554

Dear Chairman Pai,

As rates of coronavirus infection in the United States continue to climb, we write to express our concerns regarding the Federal Communication Commission (FCC)'s plans for the Rural Digital Opportunity Fund (RDOF). This global pandemic and the U.S. response to it have proven how critical broadband connectivity is to each and every corner of our nation. We therefore urge you to ensure that communities in need of serious improvements to broadband infrastructure are not left out of opportunities within the RDOF. This includes revising eligibility for the program so that states with existing investments to build out their capacity are not disqualified from receiving RDOF funding.

For the immediate safety of our public health and long-term security of our nation, the federal and state governments have asked millions of employees and children to stay away from their places of work and their schools. Many are fortunate to have jobs, schools, and high-speed internet access that enable them to continue working and learning from their homes. However, we know that the digital divide leaves our rural communities and small towns without access to basic broadband services and the connectivity that many of us take for granted.

Even if we accept the most optimistic estimates for broadband coverage, based on what we know to be inaccurate broadband maps, we know that many of our citizens are not able to work and learn from home today or for the foreseeable future.

The COVID-19 public health emergency shines an unfortunate spotlight on an issue with wide bipartisan agreement: disadvantaged Americans need access to affordable, reliable, high-speed broadband (25mbps/3mbps) connectivity to contribute to the 21st Century American economy and to achieve their hopes and dreams.

With this in mind, we ask that you reassess the framework announced for allocating approximately \$16 billion of the \$20 billion dollars available in the RDOF. According to the approach adopted through the RDOF Report and Order (WC Docket No. 19-126), areas that have already been awarded broadband funding from other programs will be ineligible for RDOF. This includes grantees of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) ReConnect program and any state efforts to expand broadband deployment. This policy essentially punishes states and communities that have taken their own steps to begin addressing broadband infrastructure. The framework does not appear to consider as a primary factor the number of people potentially helped by RDOF funding. Instead, it disadvantages locations based solely

on their efforts to address the issue through other funding sources. Given that the Phase I auction is planned to begin October 22, 2020, we believe there is time to reconsider this approach.

Opening up RDOF eligibility to communities that receive ReConnect or state broadband support would unleash the program's full potential to help our Maryland constituents as well as underserved communities across the country.

We thank you in advance for your attention to this matter, and we look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

/s/  
David Trone  
Member of Congress

/s/  
Steny H. Hoyer  
Member of Congress

/s/  
C.A. Dutch Ruppersberger  
Member of Congress

/s/  
John P. Sarbanes  
Member of Congress

/s/  
Andy Harris, M.D.  
Member of Congress

/s/  
Anthony G. Brown  
Member of Congress

/s/  
Jamie Raskin  
Member of Congress

cc: The Honorable Michael O'Rielly, Commissioner,  
The Honorable Brendan Carr, Commissioner  
The Honorable Jessica Rosenworcel, Commissioner  
The Honorable Geoffrey Starks, Commissioner